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this account of the methods which Western administrators used in dealing with this ancient country will deserve to be long read, not only because it is a truthful contemporary record of facts but also because it sets forth the motives and the maxims of policy which directed the statesman chiefly responsible for the conduct of affairs. What should we not give for a similar account of his Caledonian campaign by Cn. Julius Agricola, or for such a description of his plans for ruling Mexico as Hernando Cortes might have dictated in the quiet days he spent in that beautiful palace which still stands to commemorate him in the valley of Cuernavaca!

JAMES BRYCE.

### BOOKS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

*Letters of Cortes.* In two volumes. Translated and Edited, with a Biographical Introduction and Notes compiled from Original Sources, by FRANCIS AUGUSTUS MACNUTT. (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1908. Pp. xi, 354; vii, 374.)

A NEW English translation of the letters of Cortes is by no means superfluous especially when, as in the present instance, it is fairly commendable and adheres as closely to the text as possible, without becoming too literal. We would remark here that the Jesuit priest is never addressed or designated by the title of *Fray*, hence, Father Andres Cavo is not *Fray*. Neither was Luis Ponce de Leon who died with such suspicious swiftness at Mexico sent to Cortes merely to take his *residencia*, but properly as *visitador*. We shall refer to this point later on.

Mr. MacNutt gives us the second, third, fourth and fifth letters, the first which is lost being replaced in his book by the report of the municipality of Veracruz dated July 10, 1519, which as Mr. MacNutt observes, is not improbably a fair substitute for the lost report by the conqueror.

The bibliography given by Mr. MacNutt in the first volume is copious and reasonably complete. In the text of his introduction and of the notes to each letter translated he makes some critical comparisons of the relative value of authorities and several of these short dissertations can be recommended for their justness and impartiality, *e. g.*, references to the late Don Joaquin Garcia Icazbalceta and to the Reverend Augustin Fischer, who, however, was not chaplain to Maximilian of Mexico but, towards the end of that unfortunate ruler's career, his private secretary.

Mr. MacNutt's introduction in four chapters (followed by a translation of Cortes's last will and testament) contains a partial summary of the principal events of the life of the conqueror. Several important occurrences are either omitted or barely touched upon and the tone is that of an almost unconditional eulogy of the hero. We are

far from taking the standpoint of most British writers who write with hostility, sometimes even with invective, concerning everything achieved by Spain and the Spaniards; but neither can we agree with the author of this book in his attempt to make of Cortes almost a saint. While we heartily indorse the observations upon the standard of historical criticism to be applied to the deeds in ages past, namely, the standard of the times, their prevalent ideas and degree of culture, his admiration for Hernando Cortes carries him, in our judgment, somewhat too far. There is no doubt that he was a very superior man, a great man mentally, but morally there are flaws upon his character that are, in view of his other brilliant qualities, most unfortunate. These flaws are treated as myths and Mr. MacNutt does not seem to be thoroughly informed on the questions. We allude to the relations of Cortes with the Spanish crown after the conquest of Mexico; the mysterious death of the *visitador* Ponce, and the equally mysterious decease of Cortes's first wife Catalina Xuarez. Beginning with the death of Catalina Xuarez, Mr. MacNutt overlooks the *Pesquisa Secreta* or secret investigation of the matter published in the *Documentos Inéditos de Indias* and which contains abundant testimony most damaging to Cortes. There can hardly be any doubt that he strangled his first wife while in bed. The death of Ponce occurred under such suspicious circumstances that it is difficult to attribute it to natural causes, and it took place before he could begin the *visita*. A *visita* was nearly always an ominous measure and quite distinct from the *residencia* which every functionary of importance had to give at the expiration of his term of office. A *visitador* was frequently clothed with discretionary powers and no viceroy even could escape the results of the *visitador's* action. The home-government in Spain had ample reasons to mistrust Cortes. He had given ample proof of his inclination to do as he pleased and not as he had been bidden. His letter to the emperor dated October 15, 1524, owned and published by Don Joaquin Garcia Icazbalceta, is not only a declaration of further disobedience but almost of independence, and could not fail to arouse the gravest apprehensions at the Spanish court. Still, the government was well-nigh helpless, since Cortes was all powerful in Mexico, as his followers had declared to the king. It became necessary to use much adroitness in slowly undermining the position of so dangerous a representative, and never to let him reassume that position again.

Portraits of Charles V. and of Cortes, and reproductions of ancient maps and plans, the coat of arms of Cortes (on cover) and a map of Yucatan from the middle of the past century illustrate the two handsomely printed volumes.